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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA.

Not in Peel
MISSION WORK

AMONG THE

Indians of the North-West

A SERMON

BY

REV. PROF. HART, B.D.

MANITOBA COLLEGE, WINNIPEG.

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INDIAN MISSIONS IN THE NORTH-WEST.

BY REV. PROF. HART, B.D., WINNIPEG.

Come over into Macedonia and help us.—ACTS xvi. 9.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

THESE to us now familiar words brought before the mind and heart of the Apostle Paul the crying spiritual necessities of the nations of Europe, their need of the remedy for the world's evil, their want of the hopes and consolations offered by the glorious Gospel of the grace of God which Paul had already so earnestly and successfully proclaimed to the inhabitants of Asia. These words brought home to the Apostle's heart the great need of the men of Macedonia for the healing power of the Gospel; but, uttered by the Macedonian of the vision, they expressed rather the Saviour's desire to *save* the nations of Europe, than any desire for salvation felt by themselves. And in this these nations were not peculiar. Neither in the early days of the history of the Church, nor the later, do the heathen ask to have the Gospel sent to them. They wait till it is carried to them; and even then the martyr-records of missionary enterprise only too frequently show that not only have they no desire for the truth, but that they are filled with the deadliest hatred, both to the message and the messenger.

The Indians of these Western plains seem to have been no exception to this general rule. It was in response to no invitation from them that our Church first entered upon Mission work among them. Their degraded and wretched condition as heathen was the Macedonian cry that evoked the Christian sympathy and pity of John Black and James Nisbet—the two noble missionaries who, at that early day, represented our Church in the remote Red River settlement.

And it occurred to me, in thinking of some subject to which, according to the time-honoured custom, I should direct your attention at the opening of the Synod, that I could not do better than give you some account of our Mission work among the Indians of Manitoba and the Western territories. Our relation to this work is a subject of the highest moment to us all. It is important for us to recall to memory what has been done in the past; to consider what we are now doing, and to look forward to what we intend or hope to accomplish in this important and interesting field of missionary effort. And it seemed to me not inappropriate that I should undertake such a task on such an occasion as the present. Some of the brethren have charges close by Indian reserves on which we have Missions established. And these brethren are, I am glad to be able to say, to a large extent familiar with the conduct of the Missions in their own neighbourhood, and render valuable help both to the missionaries and the Synod's Foreign Mission Committee. But after all, the large majority of the brethren are unacquainted with this work. This should not be the case. We should all, both ministers and people, be thoroughly familiar with this, to us, the most important heathen Mission field worked by our Church. As our knowledge of it extends,

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our interest in it deepens. The duty of furnishing an account of our Indian Missions must devolve upon one of the older members of the Synod long acquainted with them. There are only a few of us that fulfil this condition, and, without unduly magnifying my office, one of these few I humbly claim to be.

THE WORK BEGUN BY REV. JAMES NISBET AND REV. JOHN BLACK.

Mission-work was begun among the Indians of the North-West by the Presbyterian Church in 1866, and the Rev. James Nisbet was chosen as our first missionary. Mr. Nisbet came to this country in 1862 to take part with the Rev. John Black in his lonely, self-denying labours along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. For four years he laboured faithfully, sharing with Mr. Black the duty of ministering to the wants of Mission stations at Kildonan, Lower Fort Garry and Headingley, where his name is still fragrant in the memory of the early settlers. During this period, the degraded and wretched condition of the Indians as they led their precarious existence, roaming through the settlement, up and down the banks of the two rivers, contracting the vices but ignoring the virtues of the whites, stirred the hearts of these two earnest missionaries. And Mr. Nisbet was constrained to offer himself to the Church as missionary to the Indians. His offer was accepted; and it was decided to begin work in the very heart of the Indian country. Accordingly, in the summer of 1866, Mr. Nisbet accompanied by his wife, a daughter of Mr. Robt. Macbeth, one of the original Kildonan settlers, set out on his long journey of more than six hundred miles over the plains to the North-West. He took with him a considerable party to assist in the erection of the necessary buildings and in the conduct of the Mission. In this party were two men with Indian blood in their veins, whose names have since become prominent in the annals of our Indian Missions. These two men—Scotch half-breeds—were John McKay and George Flett. Mr. McKay was to act as interpreter for Mr. Nisbet—a post for which his perfect familiarity with the Cree tongue, and his great readiness in it, well qualified him. Mr. Flett joined the party at the now historic Batoche, and upon him devolved, among other duties, the task of selecting a suitable site for the Mission. The objective point of the little company was the Saskatchewan country. This region was at that time occupied by roving bands of Crees bitterly opposed to settlement of any kind among them—especially to settlement whose object they did not understand, and therefore, regarded with suspicion. Mr. Flett was well fitted for the post of guide. He was born on the banks of the Saskatchewan; was intimately acquainted with the whole region, and knew all the good camping ground. Besides he was well and favourably known to the Indians as an honest and honourable trader. After several attempts to secure an eligible site that, from the hostility of the Indians, were unsuccessful, Mr. Flett chose a favourable spot near his own birthplace. On this account he claimed to have as good a right to it as the Indians. His claim was admitted, and here it was decided to found the Mission. The place was named Prince Albert in memory of the late Prince Consort. The site was wisely chosen, and the subsequent history of the place has amply justified the wisdom of the choice. Mission buildings were erected, and a school was opened for the young. Services were held at the Mission, and the Indians were followed to their camps when within reach. Soon the favourable character of the country attracted the notice of white settlers, and many, especially from Kildonan, began to settle in the neighbourhood. As the settlers increased in number, the Indians gradually withdrew to greater distances, and the difficulty and hardship in reaching them consequently became greater.

MR. NISBET'S WORK, AND HIS SUCCESSORS.

Like many another missionary in similar circumstances, Mr. Nisbet was not cheered with many visible tokens of success. In spite, however, of difficulties and discouragements, and failing health, he persevered in his chosen work, and continued faithfully to sow the good seed of the Word until 1872, when feeling the need of change and rest he visited his old friends in Ontario and passed the following winter among them. I well remember his weary and worn appearance when

he reached Kildonan. In 1873, he returned to Prince Albert and resumed his labours; but the end was drawing near. In the summer of the following year he returned to Kildonan, bringing his family with him. They reached the settlement with difficulty. In a few weeks after their arrival, he and his wife—the sharer of his hardships and anxieties—passed peacefully away to their rest and reward. A simple granite monument—a memento of the visit of the General Assembly to Kildonan in 1887—marks their quiet resting-place in the Kildonan church-yard.

The Rev. Mr. Vincent had joined Mr. Nisbet in 1872, but returned to Ontario the summer of Mr. Nisbet's death. The work was then taken up in succession and faithfully carried on by the Rev. H. McKellar, the Rev. C. Stewart, the Rev. J. Duncan and the Rev. D. C. Johnson until 1881, when the field, having become wholly a white settlement with a population of nearly a thousand souls, was transferred to the care of the Home Mission Committee. And the school, which for a number of years was so bravely kept up by Miss Baker, grew into the "Nisbet Academy" not long ago unfortunately destroyed by fire.

FORT PELLY AND OKANASE MISSIONS.

Of the original party associated in founding the Mission at Prince Albert, two members already mentioned subsequently received ordination and were placed in charge of important Missions, and are among our most successful missionaries to the Indians. These two are the Rev. Geo. Flett, and the Rev. John McKay, both men of great eloquence in their mother tongue. In 1874, Mr. Flett was appointed to labour in "the neighbourhood of Fort Pelly." And, as if this were not enough to utilize his energy, he was appointed also to take charge of the reserve at Okanase, in the Riding Mountain country, then being located. The grounds of his appointment were "his familiarity with the Cree language, and Indian habits of life and thought, as well as his genuine Christian character." Mr. Flett was ordained the year after, in 1875, and though these reserves are over 150 miles apart, he occupied them both for several years, alternating between them. When Mr. Flett took up these Missions, the Indians had just had these reserves allotted to them, and had hardly begun to emerge from their wild, nomadic life as painted and blanketed hunters of the plains. In a few years Mr. Flett's efforts began to produce marked results, and a school was opened at each of the Missions. In 1881, Cuthbert G. McKay, a student of Manitoba College, was placed in charge of the school at Crow Stand, near Fort Pelly, with instructions to carry on Mission work also during Mr. Flett's absence. For some time, Mr. Flett continued to pay frequent and prolonged visits to Fort Pelly, until Mr. McKay acquired experience enough to be left in charge of the whole work of the Mission, as far as an unordained missionary was able to overtake it, Mr. Flett paying merely occasional visits to dispense the sacraments. Cuthbert G. Mackay was also a half-breed, and skilful in the use of his mother-tongue. He was a member of the Kildonan congregation, and did excellent work, and was much liked, both in school and Mission. After struggling for some time with his arduous duties and failing health, he died in February, 1887, in Kildonan, having reached home only some three days before. He died, as he told me he wished to die, "in harness." He, too, rests in Kildonan church-yard. In the spring of the same year, Mr. George A. Laird, B.A., another student of Manitoba College, was ordained and sent as missionary to this field. And the school, after being successively taught by D. H. McVicar, B.A., and John Black, also students of Manitoba College, has developed into a large and important Industrial school under the charge of Mr. Laird, efficiently assisted by Miss E. M. Armstrong as teacher, with Mrs. Laird as matron. This school is doing excellent work. It is the largest under our care, and is meeting with gratifying success. The people are civilized, intelligent and industrious, and have neat and comfortable homes. The congregation has a communion roll of thirty-three. I have been present with them when the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was observed, and a more devout and reverent congregation it would be hard to find. The chief, Joseph Côté, is very friendly to the Mission, and has been baptized. I had an interesting letter from him not long ago, expressing his gratitude to the Church for its interest in himself and his people.

Okanase, Mr. Flétt's other Mission, which, along with Roseburn and Rolling River, has lately received the principal part of the missionary's care, presents equally successful results. The Chief, Okanase and his twelve children belong to the congregation. There is a communion roll of thirty-nine. The people have a neat church and comfortable homes. They make their living by farming and hunting, and are a civilized Christian community. There is a good day school on the reserve, taught by Miss Cameron, lately appointed.

MIS-TA-WA-SIS MISSION.

The other missionary belonging to the band that left Kildonan in 1866 is John McKay. It has been his lot to labour in the Far West, in the neighbourhood of the original Mission of Prince Albert. After ministering for several years to the spiritual wants of different bands of Indians around this Mission, Mr. McKay was earnestly invited by Chief Mis-ta-wa-sis to become missionary to his band, on a reserve about twenty miles north-west of Fort Carlton, a short time previously allotted to him by Governor Morris. Chief Mis-ta-wa-sis is one of the fruits of the early days of Mr. Nisbet's labours. He received the "good seed of the Word" from Mr. Nisbet, through Mr. McKay as interpreter. That good seed lay dormant for years, but at last it germinated and bore fruit. And as soon as Mis-ta-wa-sis was settled on his reserve, he asked to have as his missionary, Mr. McKay, through whom the Divine message first touched his heart. In response to this application, Mr. McKay was placed in charge of this Mission, and subsequently, in 1878, was ordained as its minister. Mr. McKay's labours here have met with a large measure of success. His people, like those under Mr. Flétt's instruction, have long discarded their hideous war paint, their primitive blanket, and dreary wigwam, and dwell in comfortable homes. They can read and write in their own tongue, and are fairly successful farmers. There is a good school on the reserve, taught by the missionary's daughter, Miss C. J. McKay. And there is a good congregation of fifty-six communicants. Mr. McWilliam, formerly minister of Prince Albert, speaks gratefully of the aid and comfort given to his people by Mis-ta-wa-sis and his band in the troublous days of the Rebellion in 1885.

BIRD TAIL CREEK MISSION.

The next Indian Mission, in chronological order, was established among the Sioux Indians settled on a reserve on Bird Tail Creek, a tributary of the Assiniboine. These were originally a band of refugees from Dakota. They fled from the American soldiers after the terrible massacre of white settlers in Minnesota in 1862-3. After a varied experience of hardship and danger, a number of them settled on a reserve on the Assiniboine at Oak River, and were cared for by the Church of England. Another body of them were settled on Bird Tail Creek, and in 1877, our Committee began Mission work among them, and placed in charge of them a native Sioux, an ordained minister of the Presbytery of Dakota—the Rev. Solomon Tunkansaiciye. Mr. Tunkansaiciye, or, as he was more familiarly called, "Solomon," remained among them for about ten years, when failing health made it necessary for him to retire from the work. He met with a good measure of success. During the time he was in charge, his people made great progress both in the arts of civilized life and in knowledge of the truth. They are fairly successful farmers. Last year very few of their white neighbours were as successful in securing their crops. They have a well-organized congregation with kirk-session, Sunday school, prayer-meeting and Y.M.C.A., and a very good church building, organ and all. They contribute regularly to the Schemes of the Church. Since "Solomon" left them they have been under the charge of the Rev. John McArthur. And this year they have undertaken to contribute \$30 to his stipend. They have a communion roll of twenty-seven.

ROUND LAKE MISSION.

The next addition to our Indian Missions was made in 1884. Early in that year, the Rev. Hugh McKay was appointed Superintendent of Indian Missions in Manitoba and the North-West, and, the following summer, along with our

veteran missionary, Mr. Flett, selected the Crooked Lakes agency as a needy field for Mission work. And a Mission house was at once erected on the banks of Round Lake, in the beautiful Qu' Appelle valley. Mr. McKay at once saw that, while the adult Indians were not to be neglected, his main work must be with the young. Acting on this principle, he opened a boarding school in the Mission house his first winter, and kept it open for several months, until he had to close it on account of the excitement and alarm of the Indians, caused by the Rebellion on the Saskatchewan. With the story of Mr. McKay's success in preventing the Indians from taking the war-path, we are all familiar. But who can tell what atrocities would have been perpetrated on the defenceless settlements along the line of railway, had not these Indians been restrained, and kept quiet on their reserves, by the rare courage and self-devotion of their missionary? Mr. McKay's experience with his boarding school was such as to convince him that his experiment promised the best solution to the Indian problem. The following winter the experiment was repeated and our first Indian boarding school established. Since that time, large and commodious buildings have been erected. An excellent school is carried on under Mr. McKay's charge, with Mr. E. T. Ferry as teacher. It still meets with difficulties and discouragements enough, no doubt; but, notwithstanding, it enjoys such a measure of success as to confer untold blessings upon the surrounding reserves, and show that the true method for Christian work among our heathen Indians has been discovered. Nor are the adult Indians neglected. The time that Mr. McKay does not now require to give to the school, he devotes to direct Mission work at various points on his extensive reserves. At my first visit to these reserves, in 1885, paganism, dense and dark, unrelieved by one ray of light, covered them as with a pall. Now the faith of the people in their old religion is shaken; a spirit of inquiry is abroad; and an infant congregation with twelve communicants is established. On all our reserves, there is always a large amount of mortality. Last winter it was larger on these reserves than usual; but the heart of the missionary was gladdened and the good cause helped by many a proof of the power of the Gospel to comfort and cheer, even amid the gloom of the valley of the shadow.

MISSIONS NEAR REGINA.

In 1885, two new Missions were taken up, one on the group of reserves near Regina, under Chiefs Piapot, Muscowpetung and Pasqua, and the other on the Assiniboine reserve, near Indian Head. A school was opened on Piapot's reserve, which, after leading a precarious existence for several years, was last summer merged in the school conducted by the Rev. W. S. Moore on the adjoining reserve. Mr. Moore was placed in charge of this group in the summer of 1887. In the autumn of that year he opened an Industrial boarding school, to which he has succeeded in attracting a large number of pupils, and which, in spite of utterly inadequate accommodation, has been very successful. Mr. Moore has also formed a very good congregation, with thirty-two communicants, fourteen of whom are Indians.

The Mission on the Assiniboine reserve was placed under the charge of Mr. Jas. Scott, an elder belonging to the congregation of Mr. Douglas, at Morris. Here a day school was opened. Mr. Scott also taught the people in their houses as he found opportunity, while Mrs. Scott taught the women knitting, sewing and other domestic duties. Mr. Scott was succeeded the following year by Mr. John McLean, who, after two or three years of earnest and faithful service, in which his wife took an active part, resigned his post a few months ago. The Indians on this reserve belong to the "wild Assiniboines." They speak a dialect of the Sioux. It has been difficult and discouraging work to awaken in their darkened minds any desire for higher things. Our Committee, however, is determined to persevere, and is on the outlook for a suitable missionary to carry on the work with more vigour than ever.

PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE MISSION.

In 1886, Mission work was taken up at three new points. In the spring of that

year a number of earnest Christian ladies of Portage la Prairie, seeing the degraded condition of the Sioux Indians around them, opened, with some assistance from our Committee, an Indian school, and began the Mission that, under Misses Walker and Fraser, is now so successful, not only in their excellent school, but also in the Mission church that is the means of accomplishing so much good for the whole band. We earnestly hope and confidently expect that, in the improved circumstances, this Mission has a bright future before it, and that the faithful women who opened it, and carried it on amid so many difficulties and discouragements, shall enjoy the reward of "those who go forth and weep, bearing precious seed, but shall doubtless come again with-rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them."

EDMONTON MISSION.

About the same time as this school was opened, Mission work, at the urgent recommendation of the Rev. A. B. Baird, then of Edmonton, was begun on the reserve of Enoch le Potac, near Edmonton. A school was opened and placed under the charge of Mr. Magnus Anderson, who teaches not only the ordinary branches of an English education, but also trains the boys in the elements of smithing and carpentry. A comfortable and substantial building has just been erected, and the day school transformed into an Industrial boarding school, with good prospects of success. Religious services are conducted on the reserve by the minister of Edmonton—the Rev. Mr. McQueen—and other Christian friends of that place.

FILE HILLS MISSION.

In the autumn of the same year—1886—a school was opened and a Mission established on the File Hills reserves, about eighteen miles north-east of Fort Qu'Appelle. This was placed under the charge of Mr. R. N. Toms, and faithfully and earnestly worked by him for two years. An excellent stone building was erected for the Mission, under the superintendence of the Rev. A. Robson, and put under the care of the Rev. A. Campbell, who, after rendering the Church good and faithful service for a year, resigned last autumn. Mr. D. H. McVicar and Mr. Alex. Skene were then placed in charge of the Mission work and the school respectively. This has always been a difficult and trying field to work. The Indians are unusually tenacious of their old ways, and difficult to influence in the right direction. In addition to this obstacle, there is the hostile influence of the Roman Catholic Industrial school, near Fort Qu'Appelle. The prospects of the school, however, are improving. The attendance is now larger than at any other time since the Industrial boarding school was opened.

INDUSTRIAL SCHOOLS.

The last Indian Mission work that our Church has undertaken is an Industrial boarding school in the village of Birtle. This school was opened in the autumn of 1888. Birtle was chosen from its convenient situation to a number of our reserves. The school is under the charge of Mr. G. G. McLaren, with his sister, Miss A. McLaren, as matron. It has done excellent work for the short time it has been in operation, and is a great help to our cause on the adjacent reserves.

The only school still to be mentioned is the Government Industrial school at Regina, which it is intended to place under the care of our Church. This is by far the largest, most commodious and substantial building erected for such a purpose in Manitoba or the North-West. It will accommodate about 200 children. There has been a long and vexatious delay in the erection of this building. It is, however, now almost ready for occupation, and a Principal must be appointed for it without unnecessary delay, that he may enter on his duties and have the school in vigorous and successful operation by autumn. We expect that this new school will give a great impetus to our work, and exert a helpful influence over all the schools and Missions under our care.

From this hurried and necessarily imperfect review of the work which we, as a Church, are trying to accomplish for the good of the heathen of our coun-

try, it will be evident that we attach the chief importance to our Industrial boarding schools as the great means for ameliorating the condition of the Indian, and making him a sharer in the blessings of religion and education which we ourselves enjoy, and which it is our solemn duty and our highest privilege to spread around. While not neglecting the spiritual wants of the adult Indian, we must give our chief attention to the young. The ordinary day school has not proved a success. Among pagans there are so many hindrances, so many counteracting influences, that any high degree of success is not to be expected from it. It is in the Industrial boarding school that the great work of the Church for the elevation of the Indian must be done. In these schools the children are withdrawn for long periods—and the longer the better—from the degrading surroundings of their pagan homes, in hut or wigwam, and placed under the direct influence of all that is noblest and best in our Christian civilization. They are taught the elementary branches of an English education, and, in addition the boys are trained in farm-work, tilling the soil and caring for cattle, and, in some instances, in the elements of the more useful trades, and the girls in knitting, sewing, baking, cooking and general housework; and all are taught to sing the psalms and hymns of the Church in English or Indian, generally in both, and to commit passages of Scripture to memory; while the day is begun and ended with reading the Word and prayer around the common family altar. Than sights and sounds like these what can be more hopeful or inspiring? From scenes like these, results of the noblest kind are springing. And may we not confidently expect that the generation trained under such influences will be immeasurably superior to their parents, and that in a comparatively few years our work as missionaries to heathen Indians will have come to an end?

SUMMARY.

We have now eleven Missions under our care. This work extends over nineteen reserves, with a population of about 3,500. There are seven missionaries and eleven teachers. There are besides, matrons and interpreters—missionary agencies essential to the conduct of the work. The number of pupils enrolled is 291, of whom 222 are in Industrial boarding schools. The number of communicants is 187.

The number of pupils in our schools is increasing. When compulsory attendance is enforced, as it should be, and is likely soon to be, the attendance will be greater still. Who can estimate the beneficial results that cannot fail to follow?

CONCLUSIONS.

This raises the important question, What is to be done with these Indian children when they have passed through our schools? To let them go back to their people on the reserves whence they came, "to the rock whence they were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence they were digged," would be short-sighted indeed. Their last state would be worse than the first. The true plan is gradually to abolish the tribal system, distribute the Indians, as they are trained, throughout the white population, and set them up in a moderate way as farmers, stock-raisers, tradesmen, or in domestic service. If this course were adopted, and faithfully carried out, the Indian question would soon cease to be a special factor for either the Church or the State to deal with.

We have not been very long engaged in this work. What are twenty years in the life of a people? And yet enough has been accomplished to encourage us, and fill us with hope, and show us what we may yet do with larger experience, better methods, and greater consecration to the work.

The wonderful success of Indian Missions in the United States, and the still more wonderful achievements of Mr. Duncan, of Metlakatla, before he was driven from Canada by intolerance and tyranny, show what may be done. In view of all this, let me ask, is there anything romantic or extravagant in the hope that, ere another generation has passed away, this moral wilderness of sin and sorrow shall rejoice, this spiritual desert of vileness and death shall blossom as the rose?

